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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MAPUTO 000449

SIPDIS

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AF/S - HTREGER, G/TIP - RYOUSEY, AF/RSA - MHARPOLE, INL/HSTC
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SENSITIVE

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TAGS: KCRM PHUM KWMN SMIG KFRD ELAB MZ

SUBJ: POLICE FOIL PLAN TO SMUGGLE 66 BANGLADESHIS

REF: 05 MAPUTO 0002

MAPUTO 00000449 001.2 OF 002

Sensitive But Unclassified - Handle Accordingly

¶1. (U) On April 8 Mozambican police detained a group of 66 Bangladeshi nationals attempting to enter Mozambique illegally at the northern port of Nacala, having arrived by ship from Madagascar. Every Bangladeshi had a Mozambican visa pasted in his passport, evidently stolen from Mozambique's embassy in Swaziland. The Bangladeshis were sent back to Madagascar in the same vessel on April 15; the GRM is holding the local organizer of the smuggling operation for questioning. The foiled smuggling operation highlights the relative ease of smuggling activity along Mozambique's northern coast. End summary.

66 Bangladeshis Land in Nacala

¶12. (U) On Saturday, April 8, Mozambican police arrested a group of 66 Bangladeshi nationals, including a six-year-old child, attempting to clandestinely enter the country through the Nacala port in Nampula province. Local fisherman and community leaders alerted the police to the strange activities of the "Karibo," a vessel sailing under the Malagasy flag, from which groups of people were disembarking in rowboats. The ship was seized by the Mozambican navy the following day, and 13 Malagasy crew were taken into police custody. Police informed reporters that the group had traveled from Bangladesh to Madagascar, where they waited four months before being transported to Mozambique. Law enforcement interviews with some of the illegal immigrants revealed that smugglers collected \$4,000 per person, a price tag that allegedly included a job and access to an established South Asian support network in the Nampula area.

Sent Back to Madagascar; Middleman detained

¶13. (SBU) On April 15 the vessel was sent back to Madagascar, carrying all 66 Bangladeshis aboard. A contact at the Nacala port authority said Mozambican authorities wanted to "get rid" of the Bangladeshis as quickly as possible, as

there was a critical lack of resources to house and feed them. Earlier, on April 10, police arrested suspected middleman and Bangladeshi citizen Abdul Satar Miah, who in December 2004 was detained (but later released for lack of evidence) for his alleged involvement in the smuggling of 34 Bangladeshi to Nampula from the Comoros Islands (see reftel). Press reports over the weekend indicated that Miah had been released and sent back with the Bangladeshis. However, in checking with Nacala immigration authorities, Post learned that Miah remains under detention while police continue to investigate. According to Ministry of Interior officials, the police are looking into allegations that Miah is part of an international smuggling ring with significant ties to the South Asian community in Northern Mozambique and Maputo province.

Stolen Visas

¶4. (SBU) All the Bangladeshi nationals had legitimate Mozambican visas in their passports. A contact at Immigration revealed that the visas were stolen from the Mozambican High Commission in Swaziland several months ago. The ship captain told police that he saw the visas being pasted into the passports prior to the ship's arrival in Nacala.

Illegal Immigration a Problem Up North

¶5. (U) The smuggling event has been front-and-center in the written media over the past week and prompted a TVM-organized debate on illegal immigration on April 13. Callers were encouraged to telephone with comments during

MAPUTO 00000449 002 OF 002

the televised show. They complained of an influx of "foreigners," whom they linked to drug trafficking and money laundering. One caller in particular said that a new "foreigner" in Nampula will be seen selling potatoes on the street shortly after arriving, and the next month he'll have a house with five cars in his garage. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs official participating in the debate agreed that the issue of illegal immigration should be closely monitored, but did not respond to the suggestions of nefarious activities going on in Nampula. Separately, contacts in the Islamic community told Post the arrival of the 66 Bangladeshis by ship suggests the rate of illegal immigration by South Asian muslims could be far larger than suspected. The Bangladeshis were discovered quite accidentally and, lacking patrol boats, the GRM had no way to monitor or intercept other arrivals by sea, he said.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Since the end of the civil war in 1992, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of South Asians in northern Mozambique, particularly in urban centers such as Nampula and Nacala. This incident raises questions about smuggling and possible complicity by law enforcement officials. Does the theft of the visas indicate corruption linking consular officials and human smuggling syndicates? And why would a smuggler go to the trouble of fraudulently obtaining legitimate visas only to dump people off by rowboat instead of going through a small airport with relatively untrained and presumably easily bribed immigration officers (such as Nampula or Pemba airports)? Post will continue to follow this issue in the coming months.